

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

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INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

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SUBJECT: ASEAN FOREIGN MINISTER'S ON ASEAN'S "POLITICAL WILL"

REF: KUALA LUMPUR 5045 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: FIVE ASEAN FOREIGN MINISTERS IN TELEVISED INTERVIEW AUG
2 DISCUSSED THEIR VIEWS OF THE DEGREE ASEAN POSSESSES A
"POLITICAL WILL," THE PROPOSED ZONE OF PEACE, FREEDOM AND
NEUTRALITY (ZPFN), FORTHCOMING SUMMIT TALKS WITH THE
JAPANESE, AND ASEAN'S FUTURE. THE REMARKS WERE SIGNIFICANT IN
HIGHLIGHTING IN ONE FORUM THEIR GOVERNMENT'S DIFFERING
POSITIONS ON A NUMBER OF BASIC ISSUES. END SUMMARY.

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2. IN LOCAL VERSION OF "MEET THE PRESS" FIVE VISITING
ASEAN FOREIGN MINISTERS WERE INTERVIEWED BY THREE PROMINENT
LOCAL JOURNALISTS IN PROGRAM TELEVISED AUGUST 2. SUBSEQUENT
PRESS TREATMENT CENTERED ON SUBJECT OF WHETHER ASEAN AS A
GROUPING POSSESSES SUFFICIENT "POLITICAL WILL," NOTING THAT
THE FIVE DIFFERED IN THEIR INTERPRETATIONS AND ASSESSMENTS.

PHILIPPINES FOREIGN MINISTER ROMULO CITED LACK OF POLITICAL WILL AS ASEAN'S GREATEST FAILING: WITHOUT POLITICAL WILL TO IMPLEMENT DECISIONS THAT WE (ASEAN) WOULD LIKE TO SEE ENFORCED FOR THE COMMON GOOD OF THE REGION THE ORGANIZATION WILL NOT SUCCEED, HE OPINED. SINGAPORE'S RAJARATNAM CONTENDED THAT WHEREAS ASEAN HAD THE POLITICAL WILL TO STICK TOGETHER IN SOME AREAS SUCH AS DEALING WITH A NON-MEMBER SUCH AS JAPAN, IT FAILED THE "TEST OF WILL" WHEN IT CAME TO THE ISSUE OF IMPLEMENTING THE INDUSTRIAL PROJECTS ALLOTTED TO EACH MEMBE AND OF PROMOTING TRADE IN THE REGION. ASEAN INTERESTS SHOULD OVERRIDE NATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS, HE ADDED. INDONESIA'S MALIK REPORTEDLY SAID THE MAJOR QUESTION WAS NOT POLITICAL WILL BUT "NATIONAL RESILIENCE," AND HOW TO STRENGTHEN THIS.

3. MALAYSIA'S FOREIGN MINISTER TENGKU RITHAUDDEEN WAS CHARACTERISTICALLY OPTIMISTIC, REMARKING THAT FAILURE TO IMPLEMENT THE FIVE PROPOSED PROJECTS DID NOT CONNOTE LACK OF POLITICAL WILL; ECONOMIC VIABILITY OF THE PROJECTS MUST ALSO BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT. THAILAND'S UPADIT SHARED THIS VIEW, COMMENTING THAT POLITICAL WILL WOULD LOGICALLY FOLLOW FROM THE ASEAN NATIONS CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE NECESSITY TO WORK TOGETHER FOR THEIR COMMON SURVIVAL.

4. ON THE SUBJECT OF THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN ZONE OF PEACE, FREEDOM AND NEUTRALITY (ZPFN) PROPOSAL, THE FIVE AGAIN DIFFERED PREDICTABLY INAIRING THEIR PRECEPTIONS, WITH LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THE MALAYSIAN BEING MOST OPTIMISTIC (ALL COUNTRIES SHOULD CONSIDER ACCEPTING THE ZPFN; GREATER EFFORTS SHOULD BE MADE BY ASEAN NATIONS TO FOSTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE CONCEPT). RAJARATNAM STRESSED THAT MAINTENANCE OF REGIONAL NEUTRALITY REQUIRED THE AGREEMENT OF NOT ONLY THE ASEAN FIVE BUT ALSO COUNTRIES SUCH AS THE U.S., PRC, USSR, AND SRV. THE PROBLEM, HE ADDED, IS TO PRESERVE THE NEUTRALITY CONCEPT IN THE FACE OF CHANGING WORLD CONDITIONS. MALIK SAID THAT EVOLVING GLOBAL DEVELOPMENTS WOULD LEAD EVENTUALLY TO ACCEPTANCE OF THE CONCEPT. ROMULO IN TURN PORTRAYED THE NEUTRALITY CONCEPT AS AN "UMBRELLA WHICH WILL PROTECT US IN THE FUTURE," BUT FOR WHICH IT IS NOT TIME TO PUT TO USE. UPADIT DESCRIBED THE ZPFN CONCEPT AS " OF GREAT USEFULNESS," BUT CAUTIONED THAT IT SHOULD BE IMPLEMENTED "WITH GREAT PATIENCE" BECAUSE OF THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN THE REGION, REFERRING TO THAILAND'S PROBLEMS WITH CAMBODIA AND INDICATING THAT THE CONCEPT COULD POSSIBLY BE IMPLEMENTED AFTER THOSE TROUBLES WERE RESOLVED.

4. ON RELATIONS WITH JAPAN, MALIK SAID THAT ASEAN SHOULD NOT REPEAT NOT BE AWED BY JAPAN AS AN ECONOMIC "GIANT" WHEN NEGOTIATING WITH THE JAPANESE, BUT SHOULD BE MINDFUL OF THE

FACT THAT THE JAPANESE TOO STAND TO GAIN FROM COOPERATION WITH ASEAN. ROMULO CONCURRED, SAYING HE DOESN'T BELIEVE IN SANTA CLAUS ("WHETHER JAPANESE, AMERICAN, OR ANYBODY ELSE"*) AND EXPECTED TO FIND THE JAPANESE "HARD-NOSED BUSINESSMEN" WHO WILL BE LOOKING FOR QUID PRO QUOS. HE STATED THAT "WE WILL PRESENT OUR PROJECTS TO JAPAN, AUSTRALIA OR THE U.S..... WE WILL SAY HERE'S OUR PROPOSALS (SIC)...THEY ARE GOOD FOR US AND GOOD FOR YOU. ARE YOU INTERESTED?" SINCE ASEAN IS A MAJOR SOURCE OF RAW MATERIALS FOR JAPANESE INDUSTRY THE JAPANESE WOULD HAVE TO OFFER SOMETHING IN RETURN, HE ADDED. UPADIT ECHOED THIS LAST POINT AND NOTED MUTUAL INTERESTS JAPAN AND ASEAN HAVE AT STAKE. RAJARATNAM ALSO ENDORSED TAKING A BUSINESSLIKE" APPROACH WITH DEALINGS WITH JAPAN AND THE IMPORTANCE OF UTILIZING JAPANESE CAPITAL INPUTS EFFECTIVELY.

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RITHAUDDEEN SAID THE POST-SUMMIT TALKS WOULD EXPLORE BASES FOR COOPERATION WITH AUSTRALIA, JAPAN, AND NEW ZEALAND, POTENTIAL OF WHICH SEEMS "VERY BRIGHT."

5. REVIEWING ASEAN'S PAST AND PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE, ROMULO SAID THAT THE ORGANIZATION, WHICH HAD "LOOKED INWARD" FOR ITS FIRST TEN YEARS SHOULD NOW "LOOK OUTWARD" AND DEVELOP SO THAT OTHER NATIONS WOULD BE INSPIRED TO JOIN IT. RAJARATNAM COMMENTED THAT ALTHOUGH ASEAN HAD EXCEEDED SCEPTICS EXPECTATIONS IN ITS FIRST DECADE, ITS MEMBERS STILL MUST "TAKE A CRITICAL LOOK AT OURSELVES, NOT TO DESTROY ASEAN, BUT TO MAKE IT WORK BETTER."

6. COMMENT. REMARKS OF THE FOREIGN MINISTERS HIGHLIGHTED IN ONE FORUM THEIR VARIED PERCEPTIONS OF BASIC ISSUES. THE QUESTION OF POLITICAL WILL IS MANIFESTED CLEARLY IN THE CURRENT DEBATE OVER THE ECONOMIC VIABILITY OF THE FIVE ASEAN INDUSTRIAL PROJECTS WHICH IN RETROSPECT MAY HAVE BEEN SELECTED TOO HASTILY ON POLITICAL, RATHER THAN SOUND ECONOMIC, GROUNDS (SEE REFTTEL).

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